

Voices in my head

Random thoughts by P.J. O'Leary

The thundering sounds and the "ooohs and aaahs" inspired by yet another glorious Vernonia fireworks display are now tucked neatly into the box of our fondest memories. So much gratitude is due those volunteers and contributors who year after year make this a memorable event. This time of year also marks a turning point, an awakening for so many of us.

I speak of course of that seasonal sense of passage and relief for those of us who still have our Christmas lights up. This is traditionally recognized as the point after which we might as well just leave them. Heck, come the start of November, we start looking pretty darn smart.

That's the great thing about Christmas lights, they're so incredibly durable. I love Halloween too, but those pumpkins tend to get pretty mushy on your front step by Thanksgiving. It gets to the point where they become a more gruesome specter than even the most gifted carver could have devised. Leave them there into December and you're going to need a wet-vac to suck up the remains.

I still see a quite a few Christmas wreaths hanging around town, and I feel like I should point out the hazard in that. Dry August heat has been known to set those dried-out fir needles ablaze, indiscriminately scorching door frames, sleeping cats and sometimes even the Schwans' man, melting his tasty frozen treats. Anyone who's ever had his confections exposed to open flames can tell you what an unpleasant experience that can be.

This reminds me of something one of my co-workers told me about spontaneous combustion, the phenomenon which causes people to inexplicably burst into flames. She said she had heard that studies have shown that 90% of these human match sticks are drinking alcohol and sitting in recliners when they ignite. I've since done a little research and have been unable to find any hard scientific data to support this claim. But really, why take the chance? Imagine you're sitting in your comfy, overstuffed Lane recliner watching "Dancing with the Stars." You've got a Hamm's in one hand and a bowl of Cheetos in your lap, when suddenly and without warning you go off like a Roman candle. Thanks to modern biochemical engineering the Cheetos will come out of it mostly unscathed, but there's not much solace in that when the rest of you looks like the marshmallow your three year old pulled out of the campfire. Now I don't want to frighten anyone here, but this is the kind of stuff Consumer Reports doesn't tell you about. One minute you're snuggled in the bosom of your favorite piece of furniture, and the next you're the source of a neighborhood conflagration.

So I'll see you downtown, or I'll see you at the lake, but I definitely won't be seeing you at the La-Z-Boy showroom.

Safety Matters

By Chief Mathew Workman

Another 4th of July has come and gone signaling that summer is in high gear. I was also informed that burn season is now in effect as are all of the restrictions that accompany it. Restrictions on Oregon Department of Forestry lands include but are not limited to: no smoking out of vehicles, no open fires, no fireworks, restricted chainsaw and mower use, etc. For more information you can go to the ODF website at <http://egov.oregon.gov/ODF>. The Vernonia Fire Department can also answer burn restriction questions or any questions you may have related to fire season or fire safety at 503-429-8252.

The Vernonia Police Department in partnership with several concerned citizens announces a new safety and educational campaign called "Walk Your Wheels". The "Walk Your Wheels" campaign is an effort to promote safety and to educate everyone on the laws and ordinances governing bicycles, skateboards, roller skates, and scooters. Vernonia has a City Ordinance that prohibits anyone on the above mentioned "wheeled" transportation from riding on the sidewalks along Bridge St. from Rose Ave. to California Ave. as well as along Madison Ave. and along Jefferson Ave. from Bridge St. to Maple Ave. There have been too many "near-miss" accidents involving subjects on "wheels" and pedestrians exiting buildings downtown. We encourage everyone to "Walk Your Wheels" when in these areas.

The Oregon Department of Transportation recently released a compilation of "Quick Facts" of 2006 Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes. Some facts of interest include: 19,749 injury crashes, 417 were fatal, 746 involved bicycles, and 22% (9,997) involved a driver aged 15-20yrs old. The peak month for crashes was November, peak day Friday, peak hour between 5pm and 6pm. In the injury crashes there were 29,552 people injured, 23% of injured passengers were age 0-14yrs old. Most common driver errors included driving too fast for conditions and inattention. Most common bicyclist errors included failure to yield right-of-way and disregarded traffic signal. Most common pedestrian errors included crossing between intersections and improper crossing at intersection. The complete list of Quick Facts is posted on the wall outside the front counter of the police station. Please be safe, courteous, and patient.

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